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The Communist Role in Northern Europe's Trade Unions

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A Research Paper

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A Research Paper

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Office of European Analysis. It was coordinated with
the Directorate of Operations. Comments and
queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief,
European Issues Division, EURA, []

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**The Communist Role
in Northern Europe's
Trade Unions**

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Summary

*Information available
as of 12 April 1983
was used in this report.*

Communist parties view the trade unions of northern Europe as attractive targets: the unions represent large numbers of workers and play important roles in their countries' policymaking processes. Although to date the north European Communists have had little success in controlling unions, they have gained limited influence at the local level and, in Britain, in national labor organizations. We do not foresee a significant expansion in the Communist presence in north European trade unions in the near term because of job security fears among workers; nevertheless, Communist influence could increase when economic recovery comes if the Communists can convince the workers that they are not fully sharing in the gains.

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In Britain the Communists have won places in the national governing bodies of most of the major unions. We believe they have managed to do so because the British union movement is more decentralized than other north European labor movements; local Communist activists thus have far greater opportunity to mobilize rank-and-file support through effective performance in local offices. While in West Germany, Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands, Communist parties still lack significant representation in national union councils, in recent years they have increased their representation in local and ancillary union organizations. Moreover, some gains have been made through youth organizations associated with the labor unions; indeed, in West Germany union leaders have been reluctant to curb Communist influence in youth activities.

Making inroads into the north European trade union movement is a slow and arduous task for the Communists. Almost everywhere they must contend with a pervasive suspicion of their pro-Soviet motives, and in many countries their activities are subject to close scrutiny by union leaderships. Accordingly, they pursue their goals with a classic reliance on tight organization, strict discipline, and clarity of purpose, and they do it with a doggedness and dynamism in the face of indifferent success that would discourage less motivated unionists. In union locals they undertake the unglamorous and onerous—but key—jobs that others shun; they target areas of historical worker-management strife; and they concentrate where possible on unions' youth affiliates.

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In Britain, because of the popularity of individual activists and their skill in exploiting worker concerns, the Communists have already affected national policy through the labor union movement. We think it is possible that trade union Communists throughout northern Europe might, on occasion, be able to influence national affairs on noneconomic issues that cut across social and class lines, such as the so-called peace issue and intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF).

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The Communist Role in Northern Europe's Trade Unions (C NF)

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Communist Goals and Tactics

Communist ideologists emphasize the strategic value of Communist parties forming "united fronts from below" with the rank and file in existing leftist and working-class organizations. By infiltrating or recruiting within these organizations, Communist strategists hope party members will gain influence and leadership positions that will help generate support for the party's political programs. Trade unions offer an especially tempting target for penetration. Control of a union gives a party potent institutional machinery for communicating with workers and mobilizing them to support Communist party electoral efforts and efforts to influence government policies. More important, the party acquires the use of the "strike weapon," and thus the potential to destabilize society by forcing inflationary wage increases or by challenging broader government policies. [REDACTED]

The trade unions of northern Europe offer a particularly attractive target for Communist penetration. In contrast to southern Europe, the Communist parties in this region are far too weak to win many parliamentary seats or form powerful Communist-dominated unions. A larger role in existing trade unions, however, could be translated into significant influence over national policy. Unions of northern Europe are particularly attractive as vehicles for influence because they organize even larger percentages of workers than their southern counterparts. Moreover, north European unions play important roles in their countries' policymaking processes. They participate in national planning and regulatory councils, and they exercise influence over socialist parties with which most have strong organizational or emotional links. [REDACTED]

In recent years, the Soviet Bloc's European labor policy has emphasized the cultivation of ties with non-Communist labor leaders through direct bilateral contacts and through the efforts of the Soviet-controlled World Federation of Trade Unions to take over the labor movement at the international level. [REDACTED]

Extent of Communist Penetration

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Because of prestige stemming from their contributions to the fight against Naziism and Fascism in World War II, Communist parties were significant forces in several north European trade union movements during the early postwar period. Members of the Communist Party of Great Britain, for instance, gained control of the large Electricians' Union. Dutch Communists came to dominate a new union federation 25X1 which, at its peak, represented about one-fifth of Holland's organized workforce. [REDACTED]

Rising cold war tensions and Communist efforts to sabotage the Marshall Plan through industrial action soon prompted many moderate union leaders in Britain, the Benelux countries, and West Germany to try to eliminate the Communists from union offices or the unions themselves. In 1948, the largest British union, the Transport and General Workers Union, banned Communist party members from holding office. In that same year the Belgian socialist trade union 25X1 confederation ousted members of the Belgian Communist Party from its executive board. The Dutch socialist union federation cooperated in the early 1950s with the government and employers to exclude

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The Communist Presence in North European Trade Unions

Country	Extent of Presence
United Kingdom	Well represented in local union organizations throughout movement; hold approximately 15 percent of union decisionmaking posts; comprise 10 percent of delegates to union federation's annual conference; two out of 41 members of the federation's executive board are Communists.
West Germany	Represented on a few local union bodies and in the union federation's youth organization; negligible presence at national level.
Denmark	Dominant a few minor unions and are well represented in the local affiliates of the larger unions; significant minority presence at conferences of union federation.
Netherlands	Comprise 10 percent or more of union activists but do not control or dominate any of the unions.
Belgium	One Communist on executive board of Socialist union federation; enjoy local strength in selected industries but are not important force overall.
Norway	Negligible presence at national level; some local strength in heavy industry.
Sweden	Negligible presence at national and local levels.

the Communist-dominated union federation from collective bargaining. The West German unions declared membership in the German Communist Party incompatible with union membership even before the party was outlawed in the late 1950s. []

Relying on their superior organizational techniques and on often very capable people, north European Communists have in recent years recouped some of their losses. Nevertheless, in the north European union movements examined here—those of the United Kingdom, West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark—Communists are present in substantial numbers only in the British unions, and even there they constitute a relatively small minority. Communists have the potential to

influence union behavior disproportionately to their numbers, however, because they tend to be tightly organized and dedicated, and often can exert pressure on other leftists within the unions. []

The United Kingdom. The fortunes of Britain's trade union Communists have varied considerably during the postwar era. Even after their banishment from the Transport and General Workers Union, Communists remained a fairly potent force in the British trade union movement during the early postwar years. In addition to controlling the Electricians' Union, Communists sat on the governing councils of such important organizations as the Engineers' Union (the second largest) and the Miners' Union. They also served as shop stewards in an array of industries including automobile and metal manufacturing, shipbuilding, printing, and construction. The Communists suffered a major blow in the early 1960s, however, when a coalition of social democrats and disillusioned former Communists wrested away control of the Electricians' Union from a Communist leadership which had used ballot-rigging tactics to remain in power. []

Beginning in the late 1960s, Communist presence in the unions, which represent about 50 percent of the workers, again increased significantly. Rising inflation and repeated government efforts to limit wage increases prompted workers to look to union militants—Labor Party leftists, Trotskyites, and orthodox Communists—to defend their living standards. In 1967, a "broad left" coalition of Labor leftists and Communists succeeded in electing Hugh Scanlon, a Marxist and former Communist party member, to the presidency of the Engineers' Union. Subsequently, this coalition increased its representation on the Engineers' executive and legislative councils to the point of becoming the dominant force within the union. The Communists also scored major gains in the Transport and General Workers' Union, winning 10 of the executive council's 35 seats following removal of the ban on Communist participation in union politics in 1970. []

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Communist influence in the unions declined somewhat in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but we believe Communists still play an important role in the British trade union movement. Even though a series of electoral defeats cost the "broad left" coalition control of the Engineers' Union, British labor relations experts claim that Communist party members hold approximately 15 percent of the top administrative posts and executive board seats in the major unions, in addition to filling a large number of local leadership positions. These experts also report that Communists maintain close working ties with leftist labor union officials, many of whom owe their election at least partially to the active support of Communist organizers. These officials include many senior shop stewards in heavy industry and such national leaders as Jim Slater of the Seamen's Union and (though he recently broke with the Communists) Clive Jenkins of the scientific and technical workers union. Some leftwingers are linked formally to the Communists through membership in Communist-dominated front organizations such as the "Liaison Committee for the Defense of the Trade Unions," which seeks to organize worker resistance to government attempts to control union behavior. [redacted]

Communists also maintain an important presence in the British labor movement's national federation, the Trades Union Congress. Party members comprise approximately 10 percent of the delegates attending the annual meetings of the Congress. [redacted]

Moreover, one of the Communist General Council members, Ken Gill of the Draftsmen's Union, has become a leading spokesman for the trade union left. [redacted]

The Communist role in the British trade unions may have been enhanced by Arthur Scargill's election to the presidency of the powerful Mineworkers' Union in 1982. Although now a Labor Party member, Scargill once belonged to the British Communist party's youth wing, and he openly admits to a belief in Marxism. Even though his victory margin was large, Scargill may be somewhat beholden to the organized Communist faction in the Mineworkers' Union—headed by

union Vice President Mick McGahey—because his election campaign benefited greatly from its active support. His victory, which, according to the US Embassy in London, owed more to his personal popularity than to a radicalization of opinion within the union, could enable the Communist-leftwing Labor coalition to dominate the union's decisionmaking councils. [redacted]

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In addition to the Communists, various Trotskyite groups such as the Socialist Workers Party and the Militant Tendency have tried to increase their penetration of the unions. They have been particularly active in white-collar and civil service unions, where many university students recruited by these parties are employed. The Militant Tendency and other Trotskyites recently won 13 out of 29 seats on the executive board of a large civil service union (the Trotskyites' representation on this board, however, has fluctuated dramatically year to year). Generally speaking, however, the Trotskyites have far fewer supporters and consequently far less influence in the unions than the Communists. [redacted]

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Probably because it has been totally unsuccessful in conventional political activity, the Communist party, according to a recently published study, decided at its 1979 conference to deemphasize national electoral politics and devote its resources to trade union organizing. Its major objective, we believe, is to strengthen its union membership to the point that it can force the adoption of radical policies at the Labor Party annual conferences where trade unions control some 90 percent of the votes. The Labor Party's recent decision to permit trade unions to participate along with Members of Parliament in the selection of the party leader obviously increases the Communists' incentive to penetrate the unions. That unique arrangement also

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allows the Communists a voice in the selection of Labor's candidate for prime minister in addition to the determination of the party's program and rules.

West Germany. The West German trade union movement began to relax its militant anti-Communism in the early 1970s, probably in response to the pursuit of *Ostpolitik* by its Social Democratic political allies. The unions established contacts with their East Bloc counterparts and removed prohibitions on Communist party membership and Communist participation in most aspects of union politics. Over the past 10 years, the German Communist Party—a putatively independent but Soviet-oriented party formed in 1968—has made a considerable effort to establish a presence in West German unions. Arguing that the enterprise rather than the electoral arena constitutes the main battleground of the class struggle, the party strongly encourages all its members to join trade unions and to seek recruits therein.

nearly 36,000—or about 85 percent of the party's 42,000 members—belong to unions; the West German trade union federation, however, claims that only 25,000 unionists (out of a total of approximately 8 million) are Communist party members.

According to unofficial estimates, Communists hold about half of 1 percent of factory level union leadership positions such as works council representatives. In West Germany's larger plants—those employing over 1,000 workers—Communists hold 2 percent of these positions, and in a few, 15 percent or more. In at least two major white-collar unions, the Banking and Insurance Workers' Union and the Educational and Scientific Workers' Union, the Communist party has become the dominant force in some district executive committees. One Communist has gained a seat on the national executive board of the Banking and Insurance Workers' Union and another a place on the board of the Print and Paper Workers' Union.

Despite these gains, Communist activists do not dominate or even have an important voice in most of the activities of the unions. No Communists serve as national trade union officials because,

all unions follow a

practice of not hiring them. Aided by a more open attitude among younger trade union activists, however, the Communist party has successfully infiltrated union youth organizations. In recent years, for instance, members of the party's youth affiliate have comprised an estimated 25 to 30 percent of the delegates attending youth conferences sponsored by the West German Trade Union Federation. Communist penetration of union youth organizations probably does not greatly further their indoctrination efforts because, as a 1980 union federation survey report indicated, relatively few young workers actively participate in them. On the other hand, such infiltration may be of significance over the long term because it facilitates Communist contacts with other young leftist leaders, some of whom might acquire important positions in the union movement in the future.

The Smaller Democracies. The Danish Communist Party has the strongest presence in trade unions of any of the north European Communist parties examined here except the British. Although Social Democrats control the national confederation as well as the major national unions, Communists dominate some of the minor unions such as the Seamen's Union and the Brewery Workers' Union. They also control some locals of such major unions as the Construction Workers' Union and the Machinists' Union. Communist-dominated unions tend to be among the more militant of the generally placid labor movement, though whether Communist control reflects or causes their behavior is unclear.

Finally the Danish Communists appear to be well represented at the federation level: at the federation's quadrennial conference in 1975, for instance, the Communists comprised approximately 10 percent of the delegates.

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In the *Netherlands*, the Communist-dominated union federation dwindled into insignificance during the 1950s as a result of an effective trade-union-employer joint effort to exclude it from collective bargaining. Dutch Communists managed, however, to gain some local influence within socialist unions representing port and construction workers even before the ban on their membership in the Socialist Union Federation was lifted.

Accounting for the Communist Presence

In the United Kingdom and West Germany, the degree of Communist representation in union decisionmaking councils is larger than would be suggested by their membership representation. This probably stems mainly from the Communist members' ideological zeal, their high participation in union politics, and the historical employer-worker antagonism in some industries or regions. In the case of Britain, the degree of decentralization of collective bargaining also is a major determining factor.

The Communists often are far more willing than other union members to undertake the tedious chores of daily trade union activity. Thus, when they gain the support of rank-and-file trade unionists, it is because they are effective advocates of labor causes rather than because of their Communist affiliation. Indeed,

Communists frequently keep their party membership hidden when running for work council positions in West Germany by inscribing their names on general union electoral lists rather than on Communist party lists.

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The power of the *Belgian* Communist party declined rapidly within the Socialist Union Federation following the Federation's expulsion of Communists from its executive board in 1948. Belgian Communists retained some strength only in local union organizations, particularly in the ports. Recently, however, Belgian Socialist Party leaders have publicly alleged that a number of Communists have won election to union office—some by posing as leftwing Socialists. While we have seen no substantiation for these allegations, it is important to note that in 1981 a Communist from the Public Services Union was elected to the Federation's national executive board.

The *Norwegian* Communist Party and the *Swedish* Communists have a rather small presence within the trade union movements of their respective countries. In both Norway and Sweden, Social Democrats control all the major national unions. According to a Hoover Institution report, the Norwegian Communists, along with other radical groups such as the "left socialists" and the "Maoists," enjoy some local support in the construction, wood, and metal industries, particularly in the more remote regions. An academic study of the Swedish unions indicated that Communists in Sweden control less than 1 percent of the union locals and comprise only about 2 percent of local union board members.

only a small percentage of ordinary workers attend local meetings when union officers are to be elected. Communist activists, by contrast, attend in force and sometimes employ strong-arm tactics such as "shouting down" the opposition to dominate the discussions. Through these tactics they gain a disproportionately large voice in the selection of officers.

The significance of participation levels is illustrated in Britain's Engineers' Union; the replacement of voting at meetings by postal balloting in the mid-1970s led to a dramatic surge in rank-and-file participation and to a consequent decline in the electoral fortunes of the "broad left." The Thatcher government is considering legislation aimed at encouraging still more rank-and-file participation in union decisionmaking by, for instance, requiring secret ballots in union officer elections.

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The impact of the historical worker-employer antagonism is particularly evident in Britain. Communists in the Mineworkers' Union are strong in Scotland and Wales where bitter employer-worker disputes before nationalization produced enduring antiemployer sentiments. Conversely, in Nottingham, where employer-worker relations were considerably more cordial, the Communist presence is far less pronounced. Communists also have been strong in industries such as shipbuilding, construction, and auto manufacturing where a history of employment instability and often arbitrary disciplinary practices by management have stimulated worker militancy. [redacted]

The decentralization of collective bargaining in Britain probably explains the paradox that the British Communist party enjoys the strongest trade union presence in northern Europe while garnering the weakest electoral support. In British plants, negotiations between shop stewards and local managers largely determine wages and employment conditions. National union headquarters exercises little or no supervision over either the selection or the activities of stewards. By securing stewardships—not usually a difficult task because such posts are arduous and unpaid—Communist union activists can demonstrate their effectiveness as bargainers and thereby mobilize rank-and-file support for bids to obtain higher union office. In most of the other north European states collective bargaining is centralized at the national level, and the selection and activities of local officials are closely controlled from above. Thus, Communists in these countries have little opportunity to overcome the drawbacks of their political affiliation by defending worker interests at the local level. [redacted]

In Denmark, the Communists have also secured a disproportionately large number of union posts, probably because shop stewards also have a fairly independent and important role there. In the other small north European countries, however, the extent of Communist representation in the labor movement appears in fact to be in rough proportion to the number of Communist-inclined voters. This suggests that the Communist presence in these countries' union movements has more to do with the broader appeal of Communism than to the personality of individuals and organizational factors, although these probably

also play a role. A recent study [redacted] found that workers who choose Communism do so out of a vested interest in radical change. The study found that Communist workers tended to lead less affluent lifestyles and to come from more deprived backgrounds than their Social Democratic counterparts. The study also suggested, however, that some workers, normally inclined toward the Social Democratic Party, may turn intermittently to the Communists in order to protest the union leadership's failure to press for industrial or social policy gains which jeopardize the political prospects of the unions' Social Democratic Party allies. [redacted]

The Communist Impact on Union Policy

United Kingdom. Because they are well represented in decisionmaking bodies throughout the union movement, British Communists are in a much better position than their counterparts in other north European countries to influence union policy. We do not believe, however, that the leftward shift in the British union movement's industrial and political behavior of the 1970s can be ascribed mainly to Communist activities. Although Communist union officials have played prominent roles in some major strikes, industrial relations experts maintain that industrial strife in Britain stems far more from inadequacies in collective bargaining procedures and from adverse economic trends than from agitation. Moreover, experts also agree that Communist officials generally refrain from reckless militancy because they have learned that the instigation of unpopular conflicts with management will jeopardize their support among the rank and file. When genuine grievances arise, however, Communist officials often will press for strike action in the hope of instilling a higher degree of "class consciousness" in their members through the process of confrontation. [redacted]

In our opinion, the British Communist party views industrial activities as integral to its central political goal of electing a leftwing Labor government susceptible to Communist influence. Thus, trade union Communists are unquestionably aggressive in promoting

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industrial conflicts—whether these concern economic or political issues—that promise to embarrass or weaken Conservative or moderate Labor governments. They have sought, in particular, to organize worker resistance against repeated governmental attempts to control inflation by regulating trade union wage demands. In general they oppose measures to stabilize the economy, evidently hoping that popular frustration with poor economic conditions might ultimately make the electorate more amenable to radical prescriptions and thus to radical political groupings.

The Communists' role in inciting resistance to wage restraint policies within the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has been of greatest concern to British governments. The Miners' Union mounted two economically devastating coal strikes during the early 1970s, which compelled British governments to grant the mineworkers wage increases well above limits established in national wage policies. The second of these strikes, moreover, contributed to the downfall of the Heath government in February 1974. Because the union's Communist Vice President Mick McGahey and leftwing spokesman Arthur Scargill played conspicuous roles in orchestrating these strikes, politicians and commentators expressed fears that the Communist-leftwing Labor faction could deploy its considerable influence within the NUM to disrupt Britain's energy production and wage restraint policies, and thus assure economic and political instability.

Such fears have proved exaggerated. Despite urgings by the Communists and Scargill to challenge the last Labor government's wage restraint policies, the mineworkers repeatedly voted not to do so in membership referendums. Even more significantly, twice this past year the members ignored Communist-leftwing Labor calls to challenge the public-sector restraint policy of the Thatcher government, which, unlike its Labor predecessor, does not enjoy mineworker support. The contrast between the union's behavior of recent years and that of the early 1970s is best explained, we believe, in purely economic terms. In the early 1970s, the mineworkers desperately wanted exceptionally large wage increases to recover a decline

in relative wages suffered during the previous decade. Communist strike agitation probably played no more than a minor role in prompting the mineworkers to decide on industrial action. Having achieved a significant improvement in their economic position, they have been unwilling to accept the risks that a strike might entail simply to further Communist and leftist objectives.

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In our judgment, the Communist impact on trade union policy in Britain was in fact greatest in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the "Broad Left" coalition dominated the Engineers' Union. This union's voting strength in the Trades Union Congress and in Labor Party conferences sometimes provided a major part of the margin of victory for leftwing policy resolutions. The leftward shift in trade union policy was not primarily due to Communist pressures, however. Labor Party leftists within the other unions, particularly Transport Workers' leader Jack Jones, spearheaded this shift and large numbers of Labor moderates supported it. Moreover, the labor movement's general policies have not moderated significantly in recent years despite the "Broad Left's" loss of control of the Engineers' Union.

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Now relegated to a minority faction within all the major unions, the Communists in Britain can no longer regularly exercise strong independent influence on the overall labor movement's policies. Nevertheless, trade union Communists are sufficiently numerous, well organized, and well connected to the other leftwing trade union factions to be in a position to help shape the movement's policies. For instance, at the Trades Union Congress meeting in 1979, Communists—taking advantage of their fellow delegates' dislike of the newly elected Thatcher government—nearly secured passage of a resolution opposed by the Congress's General Council calling for a policy of industrial confrontation with the government. And in the critical and closely fought contest for the deputy leadership of the Labor Party in 1981—the first in which trade unions took part—Communist executive board members in the Tailors' and the Construction

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Workers' Unions provided the deciding votes that led those unions to support leftist Tony Benn over moderate Denis Healey. Although Healey finally won, the votes of these two unions nearly tipped the election to a candidate who would have tried to shift Labor Party policy even further to the left [redacted]

West Germany. West German Communists in our judgment have had little influence on the industrial, economic, and foreign policies of their country's union movement. In all those areas, West German labor has remained relatively moderate. The Communist Party's youth affiliate, however, has played a role in shaping policies in trade union youth bodies. At the 1977 National Union Federation's youth conference, for instance, a sizable contingent of Communist youth (25 to 30 percent of the conference's total membership) combined with other leftists to defeat a motion calling on East Germany to release a dissident from prison. It also succeeded in securing passage of a resolution on unionization of the military that parroted the Communist line. [redacted]

Federation leaders have been reluctant to take decisive action against Communist infiltration of their youth wing. The US Embassy in Bonn believes they fear that such action would constitute an admission that the problem exists and thus would supply political ammunition to the Christian Democrats and their Christian Social Union allies. Eugen Loderer, the moderate head of West Germany's largest union, the Metalworkers, apparently has opposed restricting Communist activities out of deference to the strong leftwing faction in his union. According to the US Embassy, however, he does favor continuing surveillance of Communist activities to ensure they remain within the bounds of union rules. [redacted]

Smaller Countries. In the smaller countries of northern Europe only the Danish Communists have come close to having a discernible impact on trade union behavior, but they, too, appear to have been effectively quashed. The Danish Communist threat was in the form of the "Chairman's Initiative" Group—an organization dominated by the Communist party linking Communist and other leftwing shop stewards—which in the mid-1970s mounted a vociferous opposition to the Danish Union Federation's acquiescence in government austerity policies. [redacted]

[redacted] [redacted]
In any case, according to a Hoover Institution report, the Initiative Group has been relatively quiescent in recent years. [redacted]

The Communists have recently placed great emphasis on trying to bring the trade unions into the peace movement. Communist union officials, some of whom have attended conferences and courses in the Soviet Union and East Germany, have organized peace groups within the unions and have linked some of these to Communist party "peace"-oriented front organizations. The large General Workers' Union [redacted]

[redacted] has helped to organize several peace meetings and marches. Partly as a result of these activities, the Danish unions have become important participants in the "peace" campaign. [redacted]

The Dutch Communist trade union faction also has campaigned to enlist the unions in the peace movement. In 1979, the Communist-dominated Amsterdam local of the Teachers' Union, for instance, successfully introduced a motion at the union's annual conference calling for unilateral Dutch disarmament and opposing any nuclear role for the Netherlands. Under pressure from powerful Christian and socialist union peace activists as well as Communist trade unionists, the socialist-Catholic union federation has announced plans to hold semiannual conferences on "peace issues" beginning this year. In our view, trade union Communists are likely to try to exploit these conferences to mobilize worker sentiment against INF deployment. But so far the federation has refrained from taking a strong position specifically opposing NATO INF deployment [redacted]

The Communist faction within the Belgian Socialist Union Federation has been ineffectual, perhaps because the radical posturing of the federation's leadership on economic issues—and the francophone work

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force's apparent lack of interest in the INF deployment issue—have deprived the Communists of opportunities for effective agitation. The Swedish and Norwegian Communist factions have been too small and isolated to influence the industrial and political behavior of their union movements significantly.

Prospects

We believe that the Communist presence in north European trade unions is not likely to increase significantly while the current recession persists. To be sure, the Communists might score minor gains in union representation—particularly in the smaller democracies where they have some legitimacy—because some social democratic workers might now turn to them to protest their precarious economic situation. But any such gains are likely to be overshadowed by the loss of local power bases caused by high unemployment in heavy industries where Communists traditionally have enjoyed their greatest support. In Britain and West Germany, high unemployment, moreover, probably will damage Communist fortunes because it appears to be frightening workers into moderation. Because Communist candidates for union leadership posts in these countries often gain support by advocating militant industrial strategies, they are unlikely to do well as long as economic conditions remain depressed.

An improvement in economic conditions, ironically, might provide a more favorable environment for Communist union penetration efforts. A greater sense of job security could embolden north European workers to aspire to large wage improvements in order to recover losses in living standards suffered during the recession. Should moderate union leaders prove reluctant to press aggressively for such improvements—for fear of sparking a renewed economic slide or of damaging the electoral prospects of their socialist and social democratic political allies—workers might be more inclined to vote for Communists, along with other militants, in elections for union office.

We believe that, over the next few years, trade union Communists will probably lack the strength to do anything beyond organizing the occasional protest strike or securing passage of policy resolutions in

union locals. Such activities could, however, take on added significance if they serve to focus trade union attention on socially divisive issues such as factory closures or the “peace question.” Of particular concern to the United States is the possibility that Communist agitation against INF deployment might intensify the debate within the union movements of the three continental INF basing countries—Belgium, the Netherlands, and West Germany. Given popular disquiet over deployment, such a development could persuade the union movements there to abandon mildly critical positions on INF in favor of firm opposition.

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Although in Great Britain trade union Communists will remain an important force, we doubt that they will be able to shift trade union policy even further to the left over the near term. We believe moderate forces within the unions fear that the Labor Party could lose the next general election because of a public perception that the party and the unions have already drifted too far to the left. Alarm over the prospect of five more years of Conservative rule has galvanized the moderates into taking steps which should curb, though probably not reduce, the influence of the left within the labor movement. For instance, the moderates gained passage of a new system for choosing members of the Trades Union Congress General Council which is likely to decrease somewhat leftist—possibly including Communist—representation on that body. At the 1982 Labor Party Conference, union moderates coalesced behind a resolution calling for the expulsion of Trotskyites attempting to infiltrate the party; they also voted several prominent leftists out of positions on the party's National Executive. In line with these moves, the moderates would probably move successfully to block any attempt by trade union Communists to secure approval of new policies embarrassing to the Labor Party prior to the next election.

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Because trade union Communists seem destined to remain minority factions within northern Europe's labor movements—and extremely small ones in most of the continental countries—their influence on union

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behavior over the long term will depend on the political balance within these movements. To the extent that moderate socialist and social democratic forces retain control of the unions, Communists will remain on the fringes of union politics, capable of exerting influence on union policies only rarely and under special circumstances. Should radical socialists take over more top union posts—a distinct possibility since many of them are popular—then Communist influence could increase significantly. We believe that radical socialists would be more tolerant of Communists and thus more likely to consult with them and offer them administrative positions. Moreover, leftists are likely to be more sensitive to Communist criticism of their policies because they profess a broadly similar philosophy. Trade union Communists might, therefore, succeed in embarrassing leftist union leaders into pursuing radical courses of action by impugning such leaders commitment to socialism should they veer toward moderation.

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